

Trade Curb Suggested By Mitchell

Moscow Is Cautioned On Lithuania Threat

By Kenneth J. Cooper
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Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-Maine) suggested yesterday that completion of a new trade agreement with the Soviet Union could be jeopardized if Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev carries out his threat to impose an economic blockade on Lithuania.

Mitchell, who met with Gorbachev in Moscow Thursday, said President Bush might consider a "slowdown on the trade negotiations" in the event that Gorbachev shuts off oil and gasoline supplies to the Baltic state, which has declared its independence from the Soviet Union.

The trade negotiations could boost the Soviet economy by giving that country easier access to U.S. markets by reducing or eliminating tariffs on Soviet exports. Gorbachev and Bush hope to sign a pact leading to improved trade status at their summit next month.

The Soviet Union also is seeking status as an observer at international trade talks being held under the aegis of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The United States could also prevent the Soviet Union from gaining such status.

Officials Saturday said the Bush administration was weighing trade sanctions, along with the possible cutoff of certain lower-level meetings, as a possible response to any Soviet action on Lithuania.

Speaking on CBS's "Face the Nation," Mitchell carefully avoided urging Bush to suspend the bilateral trade talks or predicting how the Senate would vote if an agreement were reached.

Senate Minority Leader Robert J. Dole (R-Kan.) said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that if Lithuania is blockaded, the United States should consider giving economic aid to Lithuania or financial help to other restive Soviet republics such as Latvia, Estonia, Georgia or Azerbaijan "who might supply these vital needs to Lithuania." He did not elaborate.

Mitchell mentioned but appeared to advise against cancellation of Bush's scheduled summit with Gorbachev, the only other response to a Soviet economic blockade that Mitchell mentioned. He said Bush could use the meeting scheduled for late May in the United States "to register specifically, directly, face-to-face the displeasure that he feels" about Gorbachev's threat.

Mitchell said he and other members of a congressional delegation that visited the Soviet Union would meet with Bush early this week and discuss the various options for responding to Gorbachev.